

METHOD FOCUS GROUPS



Area of CoP Activity: Building Relationships
Learning and Developing Practice
Creating Knowledge

CoP Lifecycle Phase: Inquire

CoP Success Factor: Knowledge Production and Access to Knowledge
Learning

EIGE Step: Step 2: Analysing and Assessing the State-of-Play
Step 4: Implementing a GEP
Step 5: Monitoring Progress and Evaluating a GEP

Group Size: 4-12

Difficulty Level:

Time Needed:

Facilitator Preparation:

Participant Preparation:

Description: Focus Group is a planned discussion in a small group (four up to twelve people) of stakeholders moderated by a facilitator. Its aim is to obtain information about people’s opinions, preferences and values relating to a topic and prompting why these are held. This is accomplished by monitoring the structured discussion of a group in a non-judgemental, non-threatening environment.

More Information: Slocum, N. 2003. Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner’s Manual: http://archive.unu.edu/hq/library/Collection/PDF_files/CRIS/PMT.pdf.

FOCUS GROUPS¹

Short Description

Focus Group is a planned discussion in a small group (four up to twelve people) of different stakeholders moderated by a facilitator. Its aim is to obtain information about people's opinions, preferences and values relating to a topic and prompting why these are held. This is accomplished by monitoring the structured discussion of a group in a non-judgemental, non-threatening environment (Slocum 2003).

When to use

You should use Focus Groups when you want to:

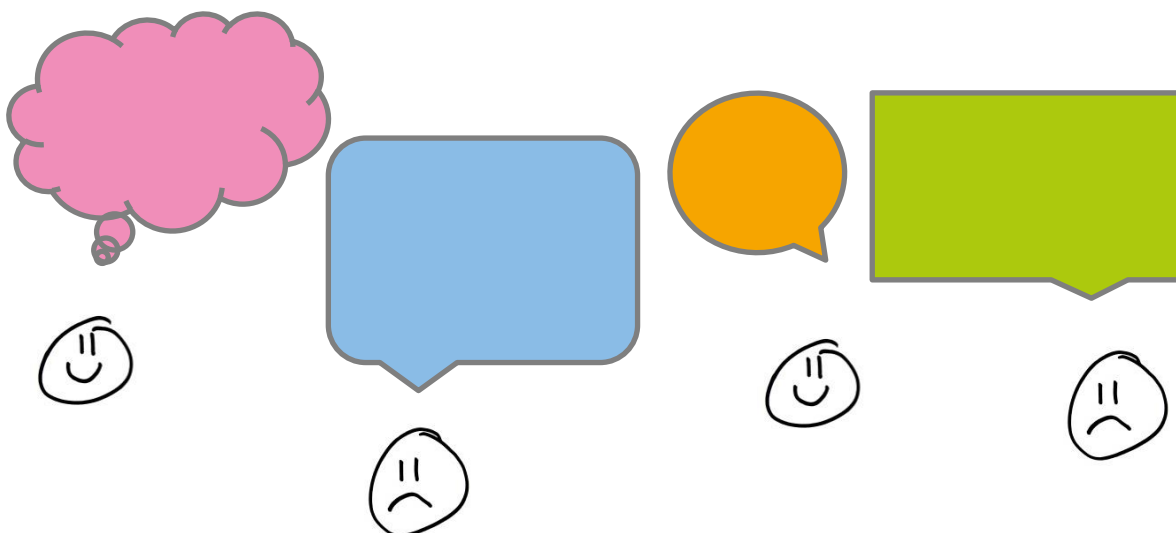
- explore the nature and strength of stakeholders' concerns and values about the issues
- get a snapshot of public opinion when time constraints or finances do not allow a full review or survey
- obtain input from individuals as well as interest groups
- get detailed reaction and input from a stakeholder or client group to preliminary proposals or options
- collect information on the needs of stakeholders surrounding an issue or concept
- determine what additional information or modification may be needed to develop consultation issues or proposals further.

How to

A: Brief explanation

First, invite two stakeholders (peers, etc.) to determine the questions explored by the focus group. Next, select the participants and invite them well in advance. Distribute the central question(s) to the participants before the event and let them prepare.

During the event (usually lasting 2-3 hours), you will moderate the group discussion through a semi-structured list of questions to elicit the views of all of the participants. Next, summarise all of the main findings and perspectives provided by the participants. Afterwards, the summaries are analysed, and a report is produced.



¹ Taken from Slocum, N. (2003). Participatory methods toolkit. A practitioner's manual.

B: Detailed step-by-step guide

- Organise personnel and administrative tasks, such as preparing and sending materials.
- Define concepts to investigate during the session and then generate questions to the participants.
- Define the informed consent procedures of the focus group and prepare the templates of informed consent and information sheets that will be sent to participants when contacting them and signed prior to their participation.
- Select an appropriate location, plan and schedule the sessions.
- Invite the participants.
- Ask someone to take notes (if you can't record the session) or help you to moderate if the group is large.
- Prepare copies of materials and identify small talk topics for icebreaking.
- Prepare audio equipment.
- Begin taping the session, welcome the group, introduce yourself and provide the background information and an overview of the topic. Encourage the participants to give voice to their opinions and that the researchers are there to learn from these outputs.
- Explain how the results of the session will be used and what form the data will take.
- Outline the ground rules: one person speaks at a time; the session is being recorded to ensure that all comments are noted; no specific names will be used in the final report; all points of view are important to the discussion. Think of your own specific context and relevant ground rules worth enforcing.
- Ask a warm-up question for everyone to answer.
- Ask the introduction question and then move to the other questions as planned.
- During the discussion, use a flipchart to illustrate the ideas expressed if you feel necessary or helpful.
- Encourage all participants to express their views, for example by asking, 'Does anyone have a different opinion?' Too dominant participants and those who talk excessively should be reined in to give others opportunity. You may suggest that all participants initially write down a few thoughts in response to a question before the group discusses it together.
- Summarise the main points of view and then asks if the summary is accurate or if anything was missed. Answer any final questions about the focus group work.

Additional ideas / information

- Make sure that all personal data collection and processing regarding the activity is carried out according to EU and national legislation and institutional rules and guidelines.
- As with the face-to-face version, you need to get approval for recording. A flipchart can be positioned within the reach of the camera, or you could explore the available options for co-creation within the online platform you are using. Any support materials can be distributed online in advance to facilitate the session.

This activity is adaptable online. In order to prepare for the focus group it would be best to send materials to the participants beforehand. Not only can they think about the topic and prepare for the discussion, but it also saves time in the actual focus group session. Recording the session for later summarisation can be done with your mobile phone, or the integral option available via the online communication tool you are connecting through. A useful tool for this activity would be, for example Zoho meeting as they have a "raise-hand"-feature. Another idea is to ask the participants to have piece of paper ready (maybe in a specific colour) that they hold up when they want to say something. This allows the moderator to structure the discussion and to avoid that people are talking at the same time.



REFERENCES

Slocum, Nikki. 2003. "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A Practitioner's Manual." Available from: http://archive.unu.edu/hq/library/Collection/PDF_files/CRIS/PMT.pdf.